

# **Fightback**

*Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism*



## **The Far Right**

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[Cover illustration depicts Al Noor Mosque, located in Christchurch, one of the mosques targeted by the far-right terror attack of March 2019 which killed 51 worshippers.]

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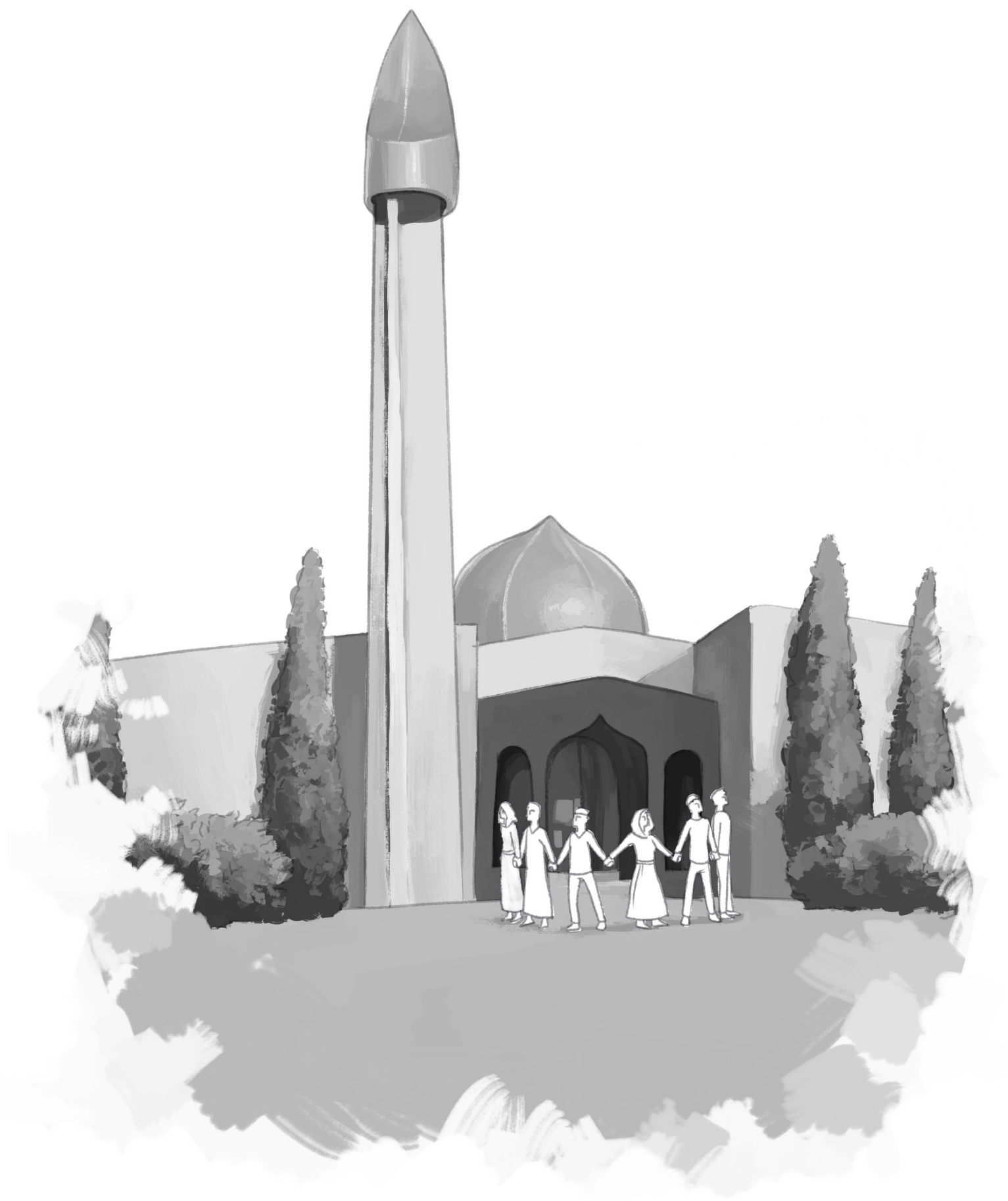
# Editorial

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As we go to press, New Zealand is approaching the second anniversary of its worst terrorist attack. That attack was the culmination of decades of Islamophobia, its milder forms propagated in the mainstream, and its more virulent forms spreading unchecked on social media platforms. We have seen the violence this form of hatred leads to before. In our feature article, we look at the genocide of Bosnian Muslims in the 1990s, events from which the Christchurch terrorist took direct inspiration, and the nationalist historical narratives that preceded it.

Nationalist narratives are with us in this region of the world. We also explore the revisionist history promoted by the far-right which reframes events in World War I as a conflict between ANZACs and Muslim Jihadis. Exploring current events, we examine the recent 'State of Hate' report on the far-right in Europe, released by the UK-based organisation *Hope Not Hate* and note the parallels and connections to New Zealand. Ani White examines what sectors of society make up the base of right-wing populist movements, and what this means for left strategy while C A Monteath-Carr looks at fascism's conservative enablers.

The second half of this issue consists of book reviews, with some suggested reading for understanding the world right now. Daphne Lawless reviews Nina Jankowicz's *How to Lose The Information War: Russia, Fake News, and the Future of Conflict*, Karen Effie looks at Ginger Gorman's *Troll Hunting: Inside the world of online hate and its human fallout* while Will Howard reviews *Culture Warlords: My Journey Into the Dark Web of White Supremacy* by Talia Lavin. While it has been out since 2017, I have also reviewed Paul Lendvai's biography of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, *Orbán: Europe's New Strongman*, which provides insight into a would-be despot admired by right-wing populists the world over.



# The genocide that inspired the Christchurch shooter

by BYRON CLARK

At the start of the livestream video that accompanied the terror attack in Christchurch, (quickly deemed an objectionable publication) the shooter plays the song “Karadžić, Lead Your Serbs”. Karadžić refers to a Serbian war criminal dubbed the “Butcher of Bosnia” by the media in the 1990s. The song is also known as “Serbia Strong” and “God Is a Serb and He Will Protect Us”, or in the online far-right spaces the terrorist frequented, as “Remove Kebab”. It’s a jingoist folk song dating back to the conflict that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia, which culminated in the largest genocide on European soil since the Holocaust.

The Royal Commission report into the shooting notes that while the terrorist travelled in the former Yugoslavia in late 2016 and early 2017 it’s “at least possible that he visited some places because of their association with historical events in which he was interested”<sup>1</sup> describing his travels as not the *cause* of his mobilisation to violence, but as the *setting* for it.

The individual was thus in Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina between 25 December 2016 to 31 January 2017. It was during this time that he wrote to the Bruce Rifle Club, which we see as the first tangible indications of his mobilisation to violence.

This article will examine how a nationalism with a specifically anti-Muslim character, and a lack of historical remembrance of the Bosnian genocide created an inspirational story for the modern far-right, specifically the man who murdered fifty-one Muslim worshippers in Christchurch.

## Historical background: constructing a nationalist narrative

The Balkan region was a kind of geographic midpoint for the different religious groups of

Europe and the near east. After the great schism in Christianity in the eleventh century, the region contained the Eastern Orthodox Serbs and the Western Catholic Croats. There has been a history of armed conflict between these two groups, largely confined to the 20th century.

The region’s Muslim population dates back to the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, the idea that Slavic Muslims and Serbs are ancient enemies, prominent during the wars of the 1990s, is much more recent; it was constructed by nationalist Serbs in the nineteenth century and projected back to the 1389 battle of Kosovo (and then back even further.)<sup>2</sup> In the five centuries following the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, Muslims and Christians coexisted in what was a relatively tolerant environment for the times. Under Ottoman rule a formal charter guaranteed the freedom of the region’s Christians to practice their religion, and Ottoman Sarajevo provided sanctuary to Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition.<sup>3</sup> The battle of Kosovo was fought between the invading Ottoman Empire and a Serbian army led by Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, who ruled the most powerful state on the territory of the disintegrated Serbian empire. The way history remembered these events has changed in recent times.

The battle was not the central theme of Serbian historical stories. Prince Lazar would become a significant historical figure only in the nineteenth century, when his story was taken up by Serbian nationalists. It was later also taken up by the Christchurch shooter, who wrote Lazar’s name on one of his guns.<sup>4</sup>

Nations are not things that occur naturally; they are always socially constructed. The Serbian nationalists of the nineteenth century could have taken a cross-cultural, cross-religious view, and based their nationhood on language. This was the approach of philologist and linguist Vuk Karadžić (1787-1865).

1 <https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/the-report/firearms-licensing/the-regulation-of-semi-automatic-firearms/>

2 Sells, Michael. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, University of California Press, 1998.

3 Cigar, Norman. *Genocide in Bosnia*, Texas A&M University Press, 2000.

4 <https://www.smh.com.au/world/oceania/christchurch-shooter-s-manifesto-reveals-an-obsession-with-white-supremacy-over-muslims-20190315-p514ko.html>



For him, Serb nationality was a function of the language; all speakers of the South Slavic dialects, whether Catholic, Muslim, or Orthodox, were considered Serbs.<sup>5</sup> This contrasts with the views of poet and prince-bishop Petar II Petrović-Njegoš (1813-1851). For Njegoš, the region's Muslims could never be part of the nation. By converting to Islam, Njegoš insisted, Slavic Muslims had "Turkified," adopting not just the religion of the Ottomans, but actually transforming themselves into Turks. By converting to a religion other than Christianity, Njegoš believed people were converting from the Slav race to an alien race.<sup>6</sup> After gaining its autonomy and then independence from the Ottoman empire in the 1910s, Serbia as a state expanded. In his book *Genocide in Bosnia*, Norman Cigar writes of what this meant for the region's Muslim population.

In the territories acquired during this phase, the Muslims were forced to convert, leave, or be liquidated. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Serbia had been largely cleansed of native Muslims and of the Turkish minority. The problem re-emerged, however, after the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, when Serbia was able to seize and annex two predominantly Islamic provinces from the hapless Ottoman Empire: Kosovo and the Sandzak, as well as Macedonia, which had a large Muslim population.<sup>7</sup> The establishment of Yugoslavia in 1918 united all Serbs in a single state, but significantly this wasn't a Serb nation state. In 1933 during a reshuffle of internal borders, Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Starić explained changes saying it was "Because of the Turks [Muslims]. I cannot stand to see minarets in Bosnia; they must disappear."

By the late 1930s, these ideologues were encouraged by the rise of intolerance in many parts of Europe, and the situation had reached the point that plans were drafted for the mass expulsion of Yugoslavia's largely Muslim Albanians. Yugoslavia, at the time, didn't have the political or military power to put this plan into action.

During World War II, fascist states allied to Nazi Germany were established in Croatia and Serbia. In addition to the pro-Nazi state established in Belgrade, other Serbian nationalists organised the Chetnik movement, led by Draža Mihailović. The goal of the movement was to establish a Greater Serbia in the Balkans.<sup>8</sup>

Operational orders provided by Mihailović to his field commanders made the Chetniks' intent toward the Muslim population clear:

Point 4. To cleanse the state territory of all national minorities and anti-national elements. Point 5. To create a direct, continuous, border between Serbia and Montenegro, and between Serbia and Slovenia, by cleansing the Sandzak of the Muslim inhabitants and Bosnia of the Muslim and Croatian inhabitants.

The objective was clarified further in instructions sent from Mihailović's headquarters to the commander of a Chetnik brigade:

It should be made clear to everyone that, after the war or when the time becomes appropriate, we will complete our task and that no one except the Serbs will be left in Serbian lands. Explain this to [our] people and ensure that they make this their priority. You cannot put this in writing or announce it publicly, because the Turks [Muslims] would hear about it too, and this must not be spread around by word of mouth.

The defeat of the Chetniks by the Communists in World War II left them unable to complete their nationalist programme, but as a compromise Yugoslavian president Josip Broz Tito granted Serbia control over several areas in the region, and Serbs were given a disproportionate share of posts in the federal bureaucracy, military, diplomatic corps, economic infrastructure, judicial system, and Communist Party – a situation which prevailed until the breakup of Yugoslavia.

## Modern History: Nationalism in the late 20th century

By the time Yugoslavia disintegrated, a ready-made nationalist ideology was available for exploitation.

But the re-emergence of nationalism was not inevitable. Cigar writes:

The transformation in interethnic relations needed for the mass mobilization of the Serbs in support of a more confrontational relationship, including vis-à-vis the Muslims, was neither spontaneous nor unavoidable.

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5 Sells.  
6 Sells.  
7 Cigar.  
8 Cigar.

Instead, a preparatory phase, marked by an intensive and methodical top-down political and information campaign in the 1980s, was required to change the value system of an entire generation of Serbs.

Well before the actual breakup of Yugoslavia, influential figures in Serbia had begun to shape a stereotypical image of Muslims as alien, inferior, and a threat. The novelist Vuk Draskovic in his book *Noz*, wrote Muslim characters as treacherous, cold-blooded murderers. The book even contains an explicit denial of the Muslims' existence as a legitimate community. One future commander of the Serbian Guard militia spoke of the influence the novel had on him:

I beat up many Muslims and Croats on vacation in Cavtat because of his *Noz*. Reading that book, I would see red, I would get up, select the biggest fellow on the beach, and smash his teeth.

Anti-Islam ideology became prominent among Serbian intellectuals. When, for example, Belgrade's Muslim community requested land for a cemetery, political scientist Miroljub Jevtić responded:

From land for the dead, the next step is to conquer land for the living. They will then seek a mosque, fully legitimately, but then, around the mosque, they will seek land on which to settle Muslims. Then, it will not be long before non-Muslims will leave, initially voluntarily but later under pressure. . . . What is planned is to settle Muslims in those areas, and to then step up the birth-rate in order to achieve numerical superiority gradually.

This concern about birth rates among Muslims is a precursor to the modern 'Great Replacement' conspiracy theory, which posits that there is a deliberate plan to overwhelm white populations with people of colour (often Muslims specifically) – the Christchurch shooter went so far as to name his manifesto 'The Great Replacement'. Much like the modern far-right's claims of a "white genocide" being imminent, Serb nationalists in the 1980s claimed a genocide against Serbs by Muslims in Bosnia and predominantly Muslim provinces of Serbia was a real possibility. In his book *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* Michael Sells writes:

By the time the Bosnian conflict began, the national mythology, hatred, and unfounded charges of actual genocide in Kosovo and imminent genocide in Bosnia had been shaped into a code: the charge of genocide became a signal to begin genocide.

In the late 1980s Serbian nationalists marched in Bosnian cities with the bones of prince Lazar, and the proclamation "We will do our utmost to crush their race and descendants so completely that history will not even remember them."

## The Bosnian war

Beginning in 1992 Serbian militias began to put this plan into action. When Serbian nationalists came to a predominantly Muslim town, the first people they targeted were intellectual and cultural leaders. Religious authorities, teachers, lawyers, doctors, business people, artists, poets, and musicians. According to Michael Sells, the goal of this was to destroy the cultural memory of the Bosnian Muslims.

In an incident recounted by the Bosnian writer Ivan Lovrenovic, a Serb army officer had entered the home of an artist in Sarajevo. This artist was Serbian but among his works was a piece that depicted a page from the Qur'an. Infuriated, the officer had all the artwork taken out into the street, lined up, and shot to pieces with automatic weapon fire.

The Serbs destroyed the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo, which was home to the largest collection of Islamic and Jewish manuscripts in the region, and later the National Library and National Museum. Mosques were another target. Between them, Serb and also Croat nationalists destroyed an estimated fourteen hundred mosques. In many cases the site of the mosques were ploughed over and turned into car parks, all evidence of their prior existence removed. Graveyards, birth records, work records, and other traces of the Bosnian Muslim people were eradicated.

Prior to destroying the recorded history and culture of Bosnian Muslims, Serbian nationalists had been emphasizing their own historical narrative. The 1389 Battle of Kosovo had been elevated to the level of national lore by the nationalists of the nineteenth century. That was still very much the case a century later.

In his speech commemorating the six hundredth anniversary of the battle, Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic proclaimed: "Today, it is difficult to say what is true and what is legend about the Battle of Kosovo. Today, that is not even important."

Norman Cigar wrote of this nationalist use of history, not as an actual chronological record of the past and its scholarly study, but as an



“ideological club” whose greatest utility was as “a potential mobilization vehicle.” The story was influential not just in the region but worldwide. Cigar writes:

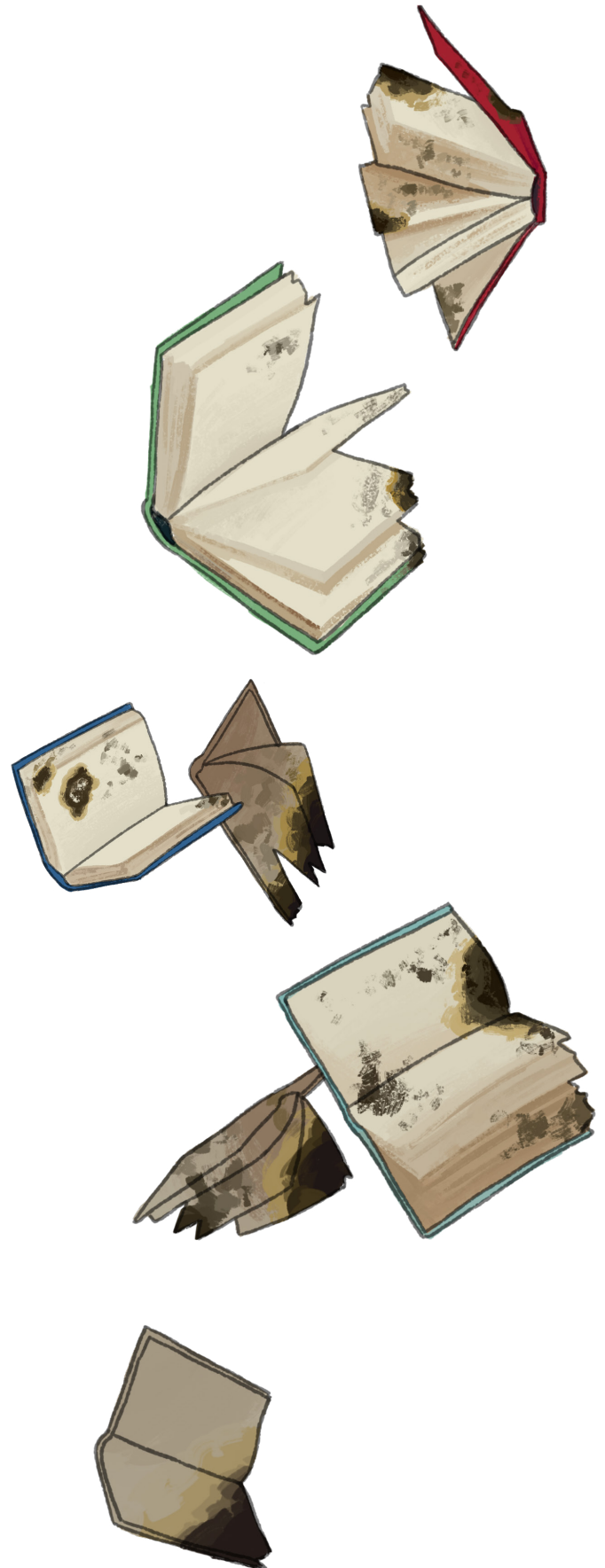
One cannot explain today’s developments, much less the occurrence of genocide, simply by taking a mechanistic linear view of such a milestone as, say, the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, in which the Ottomans defeated the medieval Serbian state. This battle, however, has been perceived by many Western observers as the root of an enduring Serbian-Islamic struggle and, ostensibly, the mainspring of the current situation.

Michael Sells writes that when the national mythology was appropriated by political leaders, backed with massive military power, and protected by NATO nations, it became an “ideology of genocide.” A set of symbols, rituals, stereotypes, and partially concealed assumptions that dehumanize a people as a whole, and justify the use of military power to destroy them.

In the city of Banja Luka, it was announced on local television that one thousand Muslims would be allowed to remain in the city (out of over 28,000). All the others would have to go, “one way or another.” By the end of 1993, of the 350,000 Muslims living in the Banja Luka region before the war, only 40,000 remained. In Bijeljina, Serb officials set the appropriate quota of Muslims who could continue to live in the town – 5 percent of the pre-war number. And in the town of Kozarac, houses were color-coded according to the owner’s ethnicity and then “destroyed systematically.” Samantha Power, a journalist covering the Yugoslav wars at the time who later became the Founding Executive Director of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, writes:

Sometimes Muslims and Croats were told they had forty-eight hours to pack their bags. But usually they were given no warning at all. Machine gun fire or the smell of hastily sprayed kerosene were the first hints of an imminent change of domicile. In virtually no case where departure took place was the exit voluntary. As refugees poured into neighbouring states, it was tempting to see them as the by-products of war, but the purging of non-Serbs was not only an explicit war aim of Serb nationalists; it was their primary aim.<sup>9</sup>

For the next three years as this euphemistically named “ethnic cleansing” went on, the West did little to stop it, and in fact, did much to facilitate it.



9 Power, Samantha. “A Problem from Hell”: America and the Age of Genocide, Basic Books, 2002.

Passing on September 25 1991, UN Security Council Resolution 713 imposed an arms embargo that locked into place the vast Serb army advantage in heavy weapons, reinforcing the power imbalance that allowed genocide to be carried out with impunity. The Serbs had access to the resources of the Yugoslav army, who, supported and financed by the Western powers, had stockpiled immense stores of weapons in anticipation of a Soviet invasion that never came. The five permanent members of the Security Council; the US, Britain, France, Russia, and China all voted for the embargo.<sup>10</sup> In the following years it became increasingly clear that what was happening in Bosnia was not a civil war, but a genocide of one ethnic group by another. The international community didn't completely ignore what was going on. The UN Security Council imposed economic sanctions, deployed peacekeepers, and helped deliver humanitarian aid. What the United States and its NATO allies did not do until it was too late, however, was intervene with armed force to stop genocide.<sup>11</sup> According to Samantha Power, the US was reluctant to intervene as they had no national interest in the region, unlike in the Gulf War of 1991.

Iraq had eventually threatened U.S. oil supplies, whereas Yugoslavia's turmoil threatened no obvious U.S. national interests. The war was "tragic," but the stakes seemed wholly humanitarian. It met very few of the administration's criteria for intervention.

Within the US establishment there were numerous high-profile resignations in protest at the administration's inaction. On August 25, 1992, George Kenney, the acting Yugoslav desk officer resigned from the State Department. News of Kenney's departure made the front page of the Washington Post. "I can no longer in clear conscience support the Administration's ineffective, indeed counterproductive, handling of the Yugoslav crisis," Kenney wrote in his letter of resignation, which the newspaper quoted. "I am therefore resigning in order to help develop a stronger public consensus that the U.S. must act immediately to stop the genocide"<sup>12</sup> It was not as if the atrocities were unknown in the West; rather, they were simply ignored by those with the power to stop them. One of the most poignant demonstrations of this was the 14 January 1994 letter to the New York Times from Louis Gentile, a Canadian diplomat who at that time was working for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Bosnia:

"The so-called leaders of the Western world have known what is happening here for the last year and a half. They receive play-by-play reports. They talk of prosecuting war criminals, but do nothing to stop the crimes. May God forgive them. May God forgive us all."<sup>13</sup>

## The Srebrenica genocide

On 6 July 1995 the Serbs attacked the UN safe zone of Srebrenica. There had been attacks before, but what made this one different was that the Serbs did not just attack the Bosnian Muslims, but surrounded the positions of the UN peacekeepers. Knowing about the UN soldiers' 'don't shoot unless shot at' mandate, the Serbs never directly attacked them.

Colonel Tom Karremans, the Dutch commander of UN troops, requested NATO air support from his superiors. But because the UN soldiers were not directly under threat, his request was denied. On July 9th, Ratko Mladić, general of the army of Republika Srpska, the Serb-held territories in Bosnia, took over the Srebrenica operation.

The next day, the Serb forces pushed forward, with the goal of taking over the enclave. Two subsequent air support requests were rejected, the first because the Serbs stopped advancing until the planes ran out of fuel and had to return to base, and the second because when the planes were refuelled and the Serbs started advancing again, it was too dark.

Karremans met with Muslim military leaders that night and assured them that forty to sixty NATO planes would arrive at 6am the next day to stage a "massive air strike." But that didn't eventuate.

There is no agreed-upon account of why the planes didn't come that morning, but they didn't. Karremans made another request over the phone, and was told he needed to submit a paper form. So a form was filled out, then returned because it was the wrong form. Once the right form was submitted, he was told air support would arrive within 45 minutes, but at 9:45am it was denied. The misunderstanding was that command support said air support *could* arrive in 45 minutes, not that it would. Another request was made at 10am. Again though, Karremans was told he had to submit a form. By the time the air strike could be approved, the planes again had to refuel.

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10 Sells.

11 Power.

12 Quoted in Power.

13 <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/01/14/opinion/l-in-banja-luka-terror-seems-uncannily-normal-870200.html>

This bureaucratic back and forth arguably prevented a decisive change in the course of events.<sup>14</sup> Mladic summoned Karremans for a pair of meetings at the local Hotel Fontana; he warned that if NATO planes reappeared, the Serbs would shell the UN compound in Potocari, where refugees had gathered. Later, with Karremans looking on, Mladic asked the Muslim representative of the Bosnian government who had been called to negotiate whether the Muslims wanted to survive or “disappear.”

The Serbs had chosen that the Muslims would disappear. What followed was the largest massacre of the war, later ruled a genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. One survivor described what he experienced:

They took us off a truck in twos and led us out into some kind of meadow. People started taking off blindfolds and yelling in fear because the meadow was littered with corpses. I was put in the front row, but I fell over to the left before the first shots were fired so that bodies fell on top of me. They were shooting at us ... from all different directions. About an hour later I looked up and saw dead bodies everywhere. They were bringing in more trucks with more people to be executed. After a bulldozer driver walked away, I crawled over the dead bodies and into the forest.

In the town of Kravica, north of Srebrenica, Muslim men were herded into a large warehouse. Serb soldiers positioned themselves at the windows and doorways, fired their rifles and rocket-propelled grenades and threw hand grenades into the building, where the men were trapped. After the soldiers shot bullets into any bodies that were still twitching, they left a warehouse full of corpses to be bulldozed.

Eventually, there were NATO air strikes which did lead to the end of the war in Bosnia. It came too late, though, for the eight thousand dead in Srebrenica. When Serbia began to ethnically cleanse the province of Kosovo, NATO was not as slow to act as it had been in Bosnia.

There was a section of the Christchurch shooter's manifesto about that Kosovo conflict. It wasn't quoted in any New Zealand media, but it was in Balkan Insight, the website of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network. The terrorist

criticised NATO forces for what he saw as attacking Christian Europeans who were attempting to remove “Islamic occupiers” from Europe.

This view was held not just by extremists like the terrorist, but by mainstream politicians in Europe and elsewhere. In 2008, the Austrian MP Heinz-Christian Strache argued that Kosovar independence was an attack on Serbia's identity, that European nations had to band together to protect the “Christian Occident” and that a failing to do so would entail that “Europe is likely to experience the same fate as Kosovo”.<sup>15</sup> When the attack happened in Christchurch, Strache was Austria's vice chancellor.

In the quarter century since the Bosnian genocide the events of the early 90s haven't taken their rightful place in our collective memory, where we can recognise Islamophobic rhetoric and fearmongering about birth rates and know the end point of this rhetoric is genocide. Instead, we have seen publications such as Renaud Camus' *Le Grand Remplacement* (2011) a book whose English title is shared with the shooter's manifesto, and Douglas Murray's *The Strange Death of Europe* (2017).

Perhaps more significant though has been the deluge of far-right content on social media, in particular on YouTube. The Royal Commission report into the Christchurch shooting noted that “[the shooter's] exposure to such content may have contributed to his actions on 15 March 2019 – indeed, it is plausible to conclude that it did.”<sup>16</sup> The commission also found that the shooter had donated money to Rebel Media, which employed Lauren Southern, who produced a documentary on the supposed Great Replacement, and Stefan Molyneux, whose YouTube channel promoted discredited ideas about race and intelligence.

Southern and Molyneux travelled to New Zealand in 2018. While they were eventually unable to find a venue to host their speaking tour, the event had sold a significant number of tickets, showing that their rhetoric is resonating here. If we do not learn from the atrocities of the past, we are never far from similar atrocities happening again.

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14 Untold Killing podcast, episode 2: “The Fall”

15 Zdravko Harmens, Hans. *Karadžić Lead your Aussies?*, 2020. <https://studenttheses.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/137654>

16 Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack in Christchurch: <https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/the-report/firearms-licensing/assessment-of-the-individual-and-the-terrorist-attack/>



# ANZACs vs Jihadis? Examining the far-right's WWI narrative

By BYRON CLARK

On April 30, 2019, the website *Right Minds*, operated by Diewue de Boer, published an article headlined "Christian Man Threatened With Arrest For Anzac Day Sign".<sup>17</sup> The sign in question featured pictures of the man's uncle accompanied by the text "Died of wounds incurred at Gallipoli fighting against the Islamic Caliphate of the Ottoman Empire – fighting for God, King, and Country." The reverse side of the sign read "Allah has no Son and so cannot be the God & Father of Jesus Christ – the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob – the God of the Holy Bible – your Creator & mine. Honour our Fallen Soldiers – Resist Tyranny – Fight for Freedom."

According to *Right Minds*, the man had been told by police, "people are feeling intimidated and unsafe". Those feelings would be an understandable response to a man making an explicitly anti-Islam statement a mere six weeks after a far-right terrorist murdered fifty-one Muslims in Christchurch. It should be noted that de Boer, the co-founder of *Right Minds*, told *Stuff* that he had read parts of the shooter's manifesto and agreed there are points where it overlaps with his movement, despite his opposition to terrorism and violence.<sup>18</sup> (In early 2020 police raided de Boer's home over a suspected illegal firearm.<sup>19</sup>)

The man attending ANZAC day commemorations in Titahi Bay, identified only as Aaron, was promoting the idea that the First World War was a clash of civilisations between the Christian and Islamic worlds. There are elements of truth in this narrative - for example the Sultan-Caliph of the Ottoman empire proclaimed an official "Great Jihad" on 14 November 1914 - but as is usually the case with the kind of historical narrative that can fit on two sides of a plywood board, the reality is much more complex.

When the war began, 90% of the world's Muslims resided in lands colonised by Europeans.<sup>20</sup> The Ottoman empire, where most of the remaining 10% resided, remained uncolonized but was highly sought after by the European powers. The Dutch Orientalist Christiaan Snouck wrote in *The Holy War, Made in Germany*:

The competition with England, France, and Russia again made it desirable for all parties that their spheres of interest should be determined. Before the war the understanding had come so far that they were expected in the present year to reach an agreement, by which England would receive Southern Mesopotamia as its economic territory, France; Syria, Germany; the part of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor which is bounded on the one hand by the 34th and 41st degrees of east, longitude, and on the other by the 36th and 39th degrees of northern latitude, whereas the northern part of Asia Minor was to be given to a French-Russian combine for railway construction.<sup>21</sup>

Snouck goes on to write "For this economic sphere of influence Germany would have felt slightly grateful, but by no means satisfied."

Germany alone can save Turkey, and she has a huge interest in doing so since only the preservation of the complete integrity of the Ottoman Empire will make it possible for Germany to protect and to develop the economic position which she has gained in it. Besides, Germany is the only one among the large powers with which Turkey has to count who would not wish to annex a single foot of the country, and could not even if she wanted to. Germany's geographical position would prevent her from effectively protecting such possessions and deriving

17 "Christian Man Threatened With Arrest For Anzac Day Sign", Diewue de Boer, *Right Minds* 30-04-2019, Archived at <https://bit.ly/3rR22DR>

18 "Radical losers and lone wolves: What drives the alt-right?", Philip Matthews, *Stuff*, 23-03-2019. Archived at <https://tinyurl.com/deboerstuff>

19 "Far-right activist's house raided over suspected illegal firearm", Matthew Theunissen, *RNZ*, 11-01-20. Archived at <https://tinyurl.com/o2kowvz4>

20 Snouck Hurgronje, Christiaan. *The Holy War, Made in Germany*. New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1915, p.9. Available at [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Holy\\_War,\\_Made\\_in\\_Germany](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Holy_War,_Made_in_Germany)

21 Snouck, p.20



The Ottoman Empire in 1914<sup>22</sup>

22 'Map of Ottoman Empire in 1914', Ministry for Culture and Heritage (New Zealand). URL: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/map-ottoman-empire-1914>, updated 14-Aug-2014.



profit from them. That is why during the twenty-five years of her more intimate relations with Turkey, Germany has always been the only trustworthy friend of the Empire of the Sultan-Caliph. There is between the two countries, apart from all questions of sentiment, a natural community of interests, whereas the interests of all the other large powers can only be furthered at the cost of Turkey's welfare, and finally of her existence.<sup>23</sup>

For Snouck, the declaration of jihad was a ploy to further German colonial interests. His work *Holy War Made in Germany* is primarily a polemic against the writing of the German politician Hugo Grothe.

[T]he question remains whether, as Grothe hopes and expects, the Mohammedan nations under European rule will really be so charmed by the call to arms issued in the name of Sultan Mehmed Reshad, that they will attack their masters "here with secrecy and ruse, there with fanatical courage." Grothe already sees in his imagination how "the thus developed religious war"—so he openly calls it—is to mean especially for England "the decline of her greatness."<sup>24</sup>

A goal of German strategy in the war was to have the Muslim populations of the British and French empires rebel against their colonisers – all in aid of Germany's own imperial interests. To this end the Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient (Intelligence Office for the East) was established. Max von Oppenheim, the head of this office, produced reports with titles such as "Die Revolutionierung der islamischen Gebiete unserer Feinde" (Bringing about a Revolution in the Muslim Territories of our Enemies).<sup>25</sup> In a memorandum titled "Exploitation of Muslim prisoners of war" ("Benutzung der kriegsgefangenen Muhammedaner", dated 2 October 1914 he suggested that a mosque be constructed in the prisoner of war camp where Muslims were being held.

The Intelligence Office for the East suggested the construction cost should be funded at least in part by Emperor (Kaiser) Wilhelm II in order to present the mosque as a gift from the German Kaiser to the Muslims. Due to resistance from the treasury, the mosque's construction was financed from the regular budget of the military administration of the

prison, but the mosque was still used for German propaganda efforts. Newspapers at the time described the good treatment of Muslim POWs "nearly as guests of the German people" ("fast als Gäste des deutschen Volkes").<sup>26</sup>

A newspaper produced by the Nachrichtenstelle titled al-Jihad was produced in numerous languages and distributed at the Halbmondlager (Half Moon Camp) where Muslim POWs from the British and French armies were held, and the camp in Zossen that was used to hold Muslim POWs from the Tsarist army.<sup>27</sup>

The success of this propaganda effort was severely limited. Some former POWs were sent to the Ottoman empire as Jihad volunteers, where they were deployed mainly at the Iraqi front. They were expected to write enthusiastic letters to their fellow jihadists still remaining in Germany describing their successful inclusion in the Ottoman army and the weakness of the British enemy. In reality though there was a lot of dissatisfaction due to inadequate accommodation, lack of food and poor treatment by the Ottoman officers, which led to insubordination and desertion. Besides that, the Ottoman authorities had preferred Germany to send settlers and workers instead of soldiers. The Jihad propaganda was ended at the end of 1916.<sup>28</sup>

There was divided opinion among Muslims regarding the war. The Islamic reformer Rashid Rida heavily criticised the Committee of Union and Progress, the ruling party in the Ottoman empire, describing them as "enemies of Arabs and Islam." Highly sceptical of German colonial ambitions in the middle east, Rida believed if Germany succeeded in building their planned Berlin to Baghdad railway, then British military power would never be able to "stop the stream of German greed."<sup>29</sup>

While Rida was an advocate of full Arab independence – from both the Ottoman Empire and European colonialism – he regularly stressed that Britain was preferable for many Muslims to Russia, Germany and France for the justice and the religious freedom given to British subjects in the colonies. Throughout the war, Rida attempted to persuade British Intelligence in Cairo of his ability, through the Decentralization Party, to influence Arab officers in the Ottoman army to rebel against

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23 Snouck, p.21

24 Snouck, p.22

25 "Introduction" in Zurcher, Erik-Jan (ed.), *Jihad and Islam in WWI*, University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 20

26 Gussone, Martin, "Architectural Jihad: The 'Halbmondlager' Mosque of Wünsdorf as an Instrument of Propaganda", in Zurcher (ed.), p.189

27 Ibid. p. 23

28 Ibid. p.211

29 Ryad, Umar, "A German 'Illusive Love': Rashīd Ridā's Perceptions of the First World War in the Muslim World", in Zurcher (ed.), p. 312

their Ottoman and German commanders. He was eager to replace the Ottoman Caliphate with an Arab one after the war. While he later confirmed his allegiance to the Ottoman Caliphate (which he distinguished from the CUP government) this was only after British authorities were unwilling to provide the Arabs with any support.<sup>30</sup>

When looking more deeply at the historical context of Islam in the first world war, the idea that the war was some kind of clash of civilisations between Islam and the Western (or Christian) world is hard to justify. It may be true that the uncle of the man who brought his homemade sign to the ANZAC commemorations in Titahi Bay was “fighting against the Islamic Caliphate of the Ottoman Empire;” however the British Empire, of which New Zealand and Australia were part, was not in a religious war with an Islamic caliphate but in a war of rival colonial powers in which the interests of one of those powers, Germany, were aligned with the interests of the Ottoman empire.

Few of the world’s Muslims conceptualised the war as a religious conflict either (Rashid Rida for example saw the conflict as a “greedy” materialistic war which had nothing to do with religion.<sup>31</sup>) with most of the world’s Muslims living outside the Ottoman empire and many fighting alongside the allied powers.

Simplistic black and white narratives of history are pushed by those who seek to wield history as a weapon in the interests of power or the ideology of nationalism, they rarely – if ever – tell the complete story. This has implications for the present. Erik-Jan Zürcher writes in the introduction to *Jihad and Islam in WWI*, a collection of conference presentations

first given on the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Snouk’s book, that what fuels the fear of Jihad in the western world today is not so much the acts of extreme and demonstrative violence that occur, but the uncertainty about the degree of support for the Jihad among the large Muslim communities in European and American countries.<sup>32</sup> It’s this fear that was exploited by Donald Trump when he campaigned on instituting “a complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States”; closer to home, individuals like Aaron attempt to grow that fear.

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30 Ibid p.321

31 Ibid p.316

32 “Introduction” in Zürcher (ed.), p 27

# The State of Hate in Europe

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By BYRON CLARK

The UK based Hope Not Hate campaign have released their annual report on the state of far-right extremism. While the report's focus is on Europe there is a New Zealand connection, with the report noting that the Royal Commission into the Christchurch terror attack, which was released last December found that the killer had made at least 16 donations to international far-right groups and people since 2017, including a total of £2,500 to numerous European branches of the Identitarian network Generation Identity.

New Zealand based fascist group Action Zealanda are also mentioned in the context of the British group Patriotic Alternative holding a day of action across the UK to coincide with International Indigenous People's Day (IPD). The event involved repeating, at a national scale, a strategy the group employed last July where they displayed a 'White Lives Matter' banner on the top of Mam Tor, a hill in Derbyshire. Action Zealanda had submitted a photo of their own 'White Lives Matter' banner drop in Auckland for the day of action. The overtly white supremacist politics of Action Zealanda have meant that rather than attempting to grow in New Zealand, they have focused on building relationships with fascist groups overseas.

A section of the report looks at the spread of the Qanon conspiracy theory, which began on 4chan and had a distinctly US focus – claiming that Donald Trump was taking on a cabal of satanic child abusers among the “deep state”, the Democratic Party, and various liberal elites in Hollywood and media. In Europe, the conspiracy has taken on local characteristics. In Greece, social media posts use the relevant hashtags to blend Q-narratives with anti-Roma prejudices and racism against black migrants. In Hungary, there is a strong connection between Qanon and antisemitism, with a specific hatred of the Hungarian born billionaire philanthropist George Soros.

There has also been a backlash against the Black Lives Matter movement, which the far-right has exploited. While the movement started in the US, in Europe it has provoked continent-wide discussions about race, colonialism and imperial legacies. Generation Identity activists in France held an anti-BLM counter protest last June where they unfurled a huge banner reading “Justice for the victims of

anti-white racism: #WhiteLivesMatter”. Generation Identity activists in Germany also sought to capitalise on a series of large BLM demonstrations across the country by launching a campaign titled #NiemalsaufKnien (Never on our knees) in response to protestors and politicians kneeling in solidarity with the victims of racial violence.

The report cites The 2020 Global Terrorism Index published by the Institute of Economics & Peace, which highlights that we are experiencing a peak of far-right terrorism in the West with 49 registered attacks in 2019, an upwards going trend for five consecutive years. Data for 2020 is not yet available but Hope Not Hate points out that there remains “a large and active terror advocating far-right community.” They note that many terror-related arrests and multiple new groups were formed in 2020, and multiple attacks and attempted attacks occurred in Germany, Norway and the UK- directly inspired by the terrorism in Christchurch.

Polling shows attitudes towards immigrants and ethnic or religious minorities are poor across all eight countries surveyed, but particularly bad in Italy and Hungary.

There are however some positives in the report too. In October, after a trial lasting more than five years, the leadership of the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn were found guilty of running a criminal organisation. That same month, former Italian interior minister Matteo Salvini of the far-right Lega party went on trial on kidnapping charges over an incident in 2019 when he prevented 116 migrants from disembarking in Sicily. With a few exceptions, far-right parties in governments have seen a drop in their support.

One of those notable exceptions is the Polish Konfederacja, who won eleven seats in parliament last year with 6.8% of the vote. Konfederacja has used social media to their advantage, gaining more engagement than the social media pages of more mainstream parties. Konfederacja's links issues of gender and LGBT rights with the reform of the educational system and the rights of parents to educate their children in their own way. Parallels could be drawn here with New Zealand's New Conservative Party, who grew a sizable Facebook following and focused on “gender ideology” in

schools as a major part of their 2020 election campaign. Konfederacja has also attempted to capitalise on the pandemic by criticising measures taken by the government such as restrictions on businesses and movement.

Attempts at rallying support against immigration for example, did not succeed in capturing the public mood.

Elsewhere in Europe the far-right have not had much success with pandemic-related talking points. The spread of Covid19 has shifted migration

rhetoric to include the risk to individual health, but the virus has not spread across Europe through the typical refugee and migratory routes. While far right politicians were calling for closing ports in Italy, for example, COVID-19 had already created clusters throughout the country, making anti-migrant rhetoric less effective.

The full report can be read at <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/research/state-of-hate-reports/state-of-hate-europe2021/>

# What is the base of right-wing populism?

By ANI WHITE

Given the global surge of the populist right in recent decades, it's worth investigating the demographic base of this political phenomenon. Probably the most prominent example of right-wing populism, largely due to prominence of the United States in general, is Donald Trump's former presidency. This article will therefore examine Trump's base, before moving on to international comparisons.

## Trump and the 'white working-class'

It's a commonplace claim that Trump appeals to the "white working class." This is almost too commonplace to need a source, but an article in UK conservative rag *The Times* typifies the claim:

Trump was elected for a reason. He spoke to a downwardly mobile, mostly white working class that had been forgotten by the elites raking in money from the global economy. By re-engaging these outcasts with the political system, he...turned politics upside down.<sup>33</sup>It's worth teasing out what is meant by "white working-class" here. According to a Marxist definition, workers are those who do not control the means of production and must work for a wage.

This definition includes educated white-collar workers, among other groups not commonly stereotyped in the term 'working-class' By this definition, any successful candidate in a mass electoral system will have a majority of working-class supporters, regardless of their other demographic features. But the *Times*' claim is more specific: that Trump appeals to an economically insecure section of the working-class, a section of the working class that has been left behind, those affected by increasing inequality.

Yet this notion of Trump voters as economically left-behind is not borne out by the numbers. According to exit polls in both the 2016 and 2020 elections, Trump appealed to higher-income households, while Democrats appealed to lower-income households:

Voters from wealthy households swung further towards Mr Trump in 2020. Just over half of those whose family income was more than \$100,000 a year supported the president, compared with 45 per cent in 2016.

By contrast, those making family incomes of less than \$50,000 voted Democratic by an 11.5-point margin (55 to 43), compared to an 8.2-point Democratic margin in 2016

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33 Caldwell, Christopher. "Donald Trump was inept – but his instincts weren't wrong." *The Times*, 18 February 2021 (tinyurl.com/bad-argument). Web. Accessed 18/02/2021.



(50 to 42)".<sup>34</sup> These numbers do not measure class in the Marxist sense (unfortunately exit polls do not gather data on voters' relation to production) but they do undermine the thesis that Trump's base is the most economically left-behind of the working-class. The average Trump voter is economically better-off than the average Democrat voter, and better-off than the average American. This played out prominently when participants in the January 6 Capitol coup attempt checked in at five-star hotels such as the Grand Hyatt,<sup>35</sup> Wealthy racists support wealthy racists.

Trump's base is substantially *petit bourgeois*: small-business owners. A poll of small-business owners in the US in 2016 found that the majority supported Trump<sup>36</sup>, and this majority only increased in 2020.<sup>37</sup> Admittedly, Trump lost support from big business in the 2020 election<sup>38</sup>, but the point remains that Trump's base is substantially *petit bourgeois* (this is also the classical base of fascism).

A common mistake conflates geography with class. Red States are portrayed as working-class, obscuring that lower-income voters, particularly people of colour, still largely do not vote Republican – with many suppressed from voting at all. Many commentators highlighted the segment of Wisconsin voters that swung from Obama to Trump, with the apparent assumption that everybody in Wisconsin is a factory worker. But the demographic makeup of Trump support in Wisconsin was much the same as it was nationwide, with the Democrats attracting lower-income voters and Trump attracting higher-income voters.<sup>39, 40</sup> The focus on Wisconsin, as a swing state, also reflects the narrow electoralist logic of the US system, which both encourages parties to chase 'the middle' (a common feature of liberal electoral systems), and gives certain states disproportionate weight (a more distinctive feature of the US Electoral College). Focusing so heavily on 'swing voters' is a recipe for rightward drift.



34 Zhang, Christine; Burn-Murdoch, John. "By numbers: how the US voted in 2020." *Financial Times*, November 8, 2020 (tinyurl.com/trump-2020-base). Web. Accessed 17/02/2021.

35 Bradley, Diana. "Hyatt faces backlash for 'harboring domestic terrorists' following Capitol riots." *PR Week*, 7 January 2021 (https://tinyurl.com/h5j0i7k1). Web. Accessed 17/02/2021.

36 Ioannou, Lori. "Small business says Trump is their pick for president." *CNBC*, 5 October 2016 (tinyurl.com/sm-biz-4trump). Web. Accessed 17/02/2021.

37 De Leon, Riley. "President Trump's approval rating among small business owners hits all-time high of 64%, survey reveals." *CNBC*, 20 February 2020 (tinyurl.com/smbiz/4trump20). Web. Accessed 17/02/2021.

38 Edgecliffe-Johnson, Andrew. "Business breaks up with Trump." *Financial Review*, 1 November 2020 (tinyurl.com/bbiz-trump). Web. Accessed 17/02/2021.

39 CNN. "Exit Polls: Wisconsin Presidential Election 2016". *CNN*, last updated 9 November 2016 (tinyurl.com/2016-wisconsin-exit). Web. Accessed 17/02/2021.

40 CNN. "Exit Polls: Wisconsin Presidential Election 2020". *CNN*, n.d. 2020 (tinyurl.com/2020-wisconsin-exit). Web. Accessed 17/02/2021.



Another argument maps education on to class. An article on popular academic non-profit blog *The Conversation*, with the headline “Who exactly is Trump’s ‘base’? Why white, working-class voters could be key to the US election”<sup>41</sup>, quotes political scientists Noam Lupu and Nicholas Carnes defining working-class as “those who do not hold a college degree and report annual household incomes below the median”,<sup>42</sup> and explicitly goes on to say that small-business owners may be included in this category. However, while education does factor into economic access, to define working-class status based on education assumes that workers are uneducated and lets reactionary petite bourgeois off the hook. Additionally, even by Lupu & Carnes’ cultural definition of the “white working-class” as those on low incomes without higher education, only a minority of Trump’s base qualifies.<sup>43</sup>

So, what *are* the defining features of the populist right’s base, if not working-class status? Trump’s base is primarily white and wealthy,<sup>44</sup> and more consciously motivated by cultural than economic factors: nationalism, race, and religion.<sup>45</sup> Even if we were to argue that economics are self-evidently more important than culture, we would still be left with the point that Trump’s base is substantially petit bourgeois (though also drawing in the more reactionary and privileged sections of the working-class). This petit-bourgeois, culturally conservative character of right voters has international parallels.

## Right-wing populism in Europe and Australasia

Before moving on to international examples beyond Trump, it’s worth defining a term: *right-wing populism*. Populism in general can be defined as a contentious politics that polarises the field between a broad “people” and a “narrow elite”<sup>46</sup> – this has both left and right variants, but the question of left-populism will be set aside for now. *Right-wing populism* tends to define its “people” in

national rather than class terms, and its “elites” in cultural terms – not necessarily the rich, so much as the liberal or cosmopolitan. Nazism is the far end of right-wing populism, with Jewish people defined as the “elites” that must be purged from the nation. My analysis of right populism is focused on the ‘imperialist core’ countries – the Anglosphere and Northern Europe, as centres of white supremacy – but similar dynamics can play out in the majority world, as with India’s Hindutva movement.

The base of populism in Europe correlates with the base of populism in the US. Political scientists Ronald F. Inglehart and Pippa Norris conducted a meta-analysis of the voters most likely to support populist parties in Europe, and their motivations. Comparing the *cultural backlash* thesis (“support can be explained as a retro reaction by once-predominant sectors of the population to progressive value change”) and the *economic insecurity* thesis (emphasising the impact of neoliberalism on working-class voters), they found more support for the cultural backlash thesis. Conservative cultural attitudes were the strongest predictor of support for populist parties, to a much greater degree than economic insecurity. Unsurprisingly, populist support was strongest among “the older generation, men, the less educated, ethnic majority populations, and the religious”. Moreover, *support for populists was strongest among the petit bourgeoisie, not among workers or unemployed*.<sup>47</sup>

Australia has also seen a surge of support for minor populist parties. In the 2016 federal election, more voted for minor parties than at any other point since the Second World War. Unusually, the Australian minor party vote increased most strongly during periods of wage and income growth<sup>48</sup> (this contrasts with an international pattern, measured over 140 years across 20 developed countries, whereby political polarisation increases most after financial crises<sup>49</sup>). In Australia, as elsewhere, support for populist parties was most correlated

41 Ketchell, Misha. “Who exactly is Trump’s ‘base’? Why white, working-class voters could be key to the US election.” *The Conversation*, 29 October 2020 (tinyurl.com/trump-wwc). Web. Accessed 18/02/2021.

42 Carnes, Nicholas; Lupu, Noam. “The White Working-Class and the 2016 Election.” *Perspectives on Politics, First View*, pp. 1-18, 2020. American Political Science Association.

43 Carnes et al. “The White Working-class...” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2020.

44 Carnes, Nicholas; Lupu, Noam. “It’s time to bust the myth: Most Trump voters were not working class.” *Washington Post* June 5, 2017 (https://tinyurl.com/ybm71el ). Accessed 22/04/2018.

45 Rubin, Jennifer. “Trump’s voters were more motivated by nationalism than economic hardship.” *Chicago Tribune* June 19, 2017 (https://tinyurl.com/yypnrreg ). Accessed 22/04/2018.

46 Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. Verso. 2005.

47 Inglehart, Ronald. *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*. Princeton Legacy Library. 1977.

48 Wood, Danielle; Daley, John; Chivers, Carmela. “Australia Demonstrates the Rise of Populism is About More than Economics.” *The Australian Economic Review*, vol. 51, no. 3, pp. 399-410, 2018.

49 Funke, Manuel; Schularick, Moritz; Trebesch, Christoph. “Going to extremes: Politics after financial crises, 1870-2014.” *European Economic Review*, vol 88, pp. 227-260, 2016.

with conservative anxieties about cultural change.<sup>50</sup> Australia has also been ahead of the curve with the mainstreaming of racial populism, with its Mandatory Detention policy for refugees initially emerging as exceptional for the OECD, but increasingly echoed internationally (as with Trump's detention camps).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2020's General Election saw newly-formed populist parties roundly defeated.<sup>51</sup> Labour PM Jacinda Ardern was able to sell herself as a competent crisis manager, winning over a broad swathe of the electorate including many traditional right voters.<sup>52</sup> Ardern was successful where Corbyn in the UK and Sanders in the US were not, despite the dreams of some on their populist-left flank<sup>53</sup>: win over the base of the right. In doing so, she demonstrated why this is not a viable left strategy: Labour is unwilling to alienate their new friends with any radical measures, or even moderate measures such as property taxes to address the housing crisis, which would cut into the wealth of the property-owning middle-class.<sup>54, 55, 56</sup> Although Ardern's strategy is centrist rather than populist, it demonstrates a central danger in appealing to the right's base: the danger of successfully becoming the sort of party right-wingers want to vote for.

## What does this mean for left strategy?

The simplest strategic point to draw from all this is the following: the left should not build a strategy on appealing to the most culturally conservative, economically wealthy section of the electorate. While this point may seem blindingly obvious to some, it's apparently not obvious to 'left' commentators such as Glenn Greenwald, who recently commented that he considered (millionaire right-wing Fox anchor) Tucker Carlson and (Trump strategist) Steve Bannon to be 'socialists', explaining that "you have this kind of right wing populism,

which really is socialism."<sup>57</sup> Although this statement may be patently absurd, it's also reflective of the mindset that the far-right are potential allies of the left.

Although there are conservatives that can be won over, this should not be our primary orientation. Moreover, those that can be won over should be won through a politics of solidarity, rather than pandering.

The claim that the populist right's base is primarily "white working-class" is both misleading, and inherently beneficial to the right. The claim gives conservatives a stamp of authenticity, given their discrediting association with business interests, and generally unpopular social policies. The circulation of this claim among leftists and liberals is an own-goal at best, and a gateway to reactionary politics at worst. The outsize focus on the "white working-class" also obscures that the working-class are disproportionately people of colour.

The good news is that we don't need to win over the base of the right to win. In the US, crudely rounding the numbers, Republican voters make up about 25% of the population, with about 25% voting Democrat, and about 50% not participating in elections (the actually left-behind). A strategy appealing to that 75% working-class majority, rather than the wealthiest and most reactionary 25%, has more transformative potential. And beyond the USA, the global working-class are mostly people of colour.

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50 Wood et al. "Australia Demonstrates..." *Australian Economic Review*, 2018.

51 Clark, Byron. "Conspiracy theorists big losers in NZ election." *Fightback*, 5 December 2020 ([tinyurl.com/nz-losers](https://tinyurl.com/nz-losers)). Web. Accessed 18/02/2021.

52 Malpass, Luke. "Forget left and right, Jacinda Ardern's in the middle." *Financial Review*, 23 October 2020 ([tinyurl.com/ardern-middle](https://tinyurl.com/ardern-middle)). Web. Accessed 18/02/2021.

53 Lawless, Daphne. "Left Populism at the dead end: where to after Corbyn and Sanders?" *Fightback*, 25 August 2020 ([tinyurl.com/dead-populism](https://tinyurl.com/dead-populism)). Web. Accessed 18/02/2021.

54 Sachs, Justine. "Jacinda Ardern Is Not Your Friend." *Jacobin*, 12 February 2021 ([tinyurl.com/jacobin-ardern](https://tinyurl.com/jacobin-ardern)). Web. Accessed 18/02/2021.

55 White, Ani. "Lawmakers, not lawbreakers": Jacindamania as a bastion of the Third Way." *Fightback*, 1 September 2020 ([tinyurl.com/fightback-ardern](https://tinyurl.com/fightback-ardern)). Web. Accessed 18/02/2021.

56 Green Left Radio. "New Zealand Elections: Left Response." *Green Left Radio*, 24 October 2020 ([tinyurl.com/greenleft-ardern](https://tinyurl.com/greenleft-ardern)). Web. Accessed 18/02/2021.

57 Richardson, Reed. "Glenn Greenwald Describes Tucker Carlson, Bannon and 2016-era Trump as Right Wing 'Socialists'." *Mediaite*, 4 March 2021 (<https://tinyurl.com/wow-greenwald>). Web. Accessed 05/03/2021.



# Fascism's conservative enablers

By CA MONTEATH-CARR

In March of 2020, two nationalists and a libertarian sat down for “the ideological debate of the century: Conservatism vs Libertarianism.”<sup>58</sup>

The debate was not widely viewed, garnering less than a thousand views across YouTube, BitChute, and live viewers. The host, James Davidson, is a far-right content creator and former member of the ACT party. His past projects include *JChannel*, now rebranded as *RightTimes.tv*, a streaming channel that covers topics such as “white wellbeing” and how multiculturalism is a “cold war” against traditional Western values.

The libertarian, Stephen Berry, is a former deputy leader of the LibertarianNZ party – the fringe political party for people who think ACT are mainstream, statist sell-outs. Stephen is not an incredibly deep political thinker, and it is not clear that he realises who or what his interlocutors are;

he presents his views, but never meaningfully pushes back against anything the other two participants bring up.

The third man, Dieuwe de Boer, is another far-right blogger. He runs *Right Minds NZ*, a blog where he rails against abortion (“Abortion Is Really Sick, Extreme, and Odious,” reads a blog post dated 19/03/2020,<sup>59</sup> “we need those who can train Christians on how to agitate against abortion in the way that churches fought and ended slavery two centuries ago,” a somewhat ahistorical view of American Christianity’s relationship with the Peculiar Institution). His blog minimises and downplays systemic and societal racism in New Zealand (the Christchurch shooter’s eco-fascism is compared to climate change activists Extinction Rebellion; systemic racism in New Zealand is “the dirtiest of dirty lies ... being peddled by people who

58 See <https://righttimes.tv/libertarianism-conservatism-debate/>  
59 Archived at <https://bit.ly/2NBEapC>

have a special interest in New Zealand being viewed as a racist hellhole.”)

The debate is less interesting for any questions it poses and fails to answer as to the merits of xenophobic nationalism versus libertarianism as moral and political philosophies, and more interesting in how de Boer and Davidson market their xenophobic nationalism as mere ‘conservatism.’

The far right, in Aotearoa and around the world, realise that their beliefs are on the edge of political respectability, and so activists such as de Boer and Davidson go to some lengths to launder their beliefs and so push them further into the mainstream.

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There is historical precedent for this. Ever since fascism – the particular blend of racism, nationalism, the allure of a romanticised historical greatness, the cult of libationary violence and heroic action for action’s own sake, and the rejection of modernity and multiculturalism – arose in the early 20th century in the shadow of the horrors of The Great War and gained traction in Europe following the economic collapse of the Great Depression, fascist parties and agitators have always needed the support of mainstream conservatives in order to take and hold power.

Mussolini, for example, was installed as dictator of Italy once his March on Rome convinced right-wing business leaders and the King that he was the best defence they had against a left-wing parliament. Hitler, too, was made Chancellor not by winning a free election, but by social conservatives and business leaders who feared Social Democratic reforms. Today, in the 21st century, far-right leaders and would-be dictators from Hungary’s Viktor Orbán, India’s Narendra Modi, Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro, to Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to power by rising to the leadership of right- and centre-right parties and using their power to popularise their xenophobic nationalism.

While not every far-right activist believes in taking power through electoral politics, it is worth keeping an eye on the ones who do. The very online far-right activists are adept at seeding their ideas throughout the culture; this is how a popular celebrity chef ends up re-posting a cartoon containing occult Nazi symbolism or how the centre-right National party echoed far-right conspiracy theories about the UN Global Compact on Migration in 2018, and continued to do so as recently as July 2019, despite the fact that a man, acting on a sincere belief in these conspiracy theories, murdered 51 innocent people in Ōtautahi/Christchurch six months earlier.

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Back in the debate, de Boer’s chief complaint against libertarianism, it seems, is that it focuses too much on the individual, almost as if there is “too much liberty,” and that libertarianism doesn’t have an anchor to the past.

While de Boer might be applauded for believing that there is, in fact, such a thing as society, the society he wants is a homogenous one, with no room for diverse lifestyles. There is a correct way to live, and it is the role of the state to promote and if necessary enforce that.

Without the state monopoly of force, he says, “you lose the ability to keep a cohesive nation of people who have similar values and similar ideas and similar backgrounds to keep your nation together, and you probably end up with a government that needs to get bigger and stronger to stop people from fighting each other.”

This emphasis on there being One True Way to live one’s life is a recurring motif in de Boer’s thought. The correct way of life has already been discovered and proven; all that remains is to follow it. This One True Way is, of course, grounded in “Anglo-Christian heritage and culture,” and can be applied very effectively throughout the world.

Colonialism, in other words, was good for Māori. According to de Boer, “Māori embraced and adopted a lot of this English culture, with high literacy rates compared to England.” It’s only when New Zealand adopts the “socialist approach” that Māori start to suffer:

...what happened in the 20th century it was the adoption of the more ‘socialist approach’ was what’s being very damaging to Maori and I think that conservatism does have the answer to the social issues that Maori are seeing and that what the Left in general and socialism is offering them that’s what’s actually maintaining the – you know if you have intergenerational welfare, if you have if you’re being encouraged to go back to these old ways, to ‘decolonise,’ that is actually harmful I believe and that the Western way of life is adaptable for everyone and that it will actually improve outcomes.

De Boer very explicitly ties British Imperialism, colonisation and conquest to his view of conservatism – they are one and the same. De Boer frames the spread of the British Empire, it’s exploitation of indigenous people, and extraction of foreign wealth, as merely “exporting Conservatism.”



Historically speaking that's what conservatism especially in the English sense has done. What we refer to as the Anglosphere countries – you know, England, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, America – are basically the most prosperous and wealthy countries in the world. Singapore and Hong Kong [were] outposts there and you had some in Africa until recently anyway that were doing very well and so consider, it was mocked and it was mocked today but the idea that at least the English conservatives had was hey we can go to these people and we can share our religion with them and show them how we build our society and then they can come on board and join into this.

Not that de Boer means to whitewash or brush off the less savoury aspects of Colonialism, mind:

Sometimes a little bit too aggressively and too much force was used I'm not saying this was like perfect and all roses you know this was wonderful and lovely and everyone loved it and it was great for everybody but looking back at it in the long run this is something that did work and so I have no particular objection to it in that way. I get of course that not everybody might want to be a part of that but again that is something that did that conservatives have done and has worked well so the idea, you can export conservatism and especially the English did they exported their conservatism around the world and it exported very very well.

(Stephen Berry, asked for comment after this speech, says he has nothing to add.)

While it's quite common for small-c social conservatives to romanticise the British Empire and make apologetics for colonialism, de Boer elevates this "Western Chauvinism" into an ideology, and justifies the violence and oppression of colonial rule by pointing to the material wealth hoarded by the perpetrators of the violence and descendants of the oppressors. White countries can be seen as the current global hegemon, therefore, white culture is the best culture, and should be imposed upon everybody, by force if necessary.

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De Boer would go on to stand as the New Conservative party's candidate for Botany in the 2020 general election, the seat vacated by Jamie-Lee Ross (Advance NZ) and ultimately won by Christopher Luxon (National).

De Boer only won 482 votes, a mere 1.54% of electorate votes cast in the seat. This can be

thought of as a comforting statistic: de Boer is not a natural or charismatic public speaker, and Botany is a traditionally safe National seat, so this result is well within expectations for a neophyte candidate from a fringe party.

Alternatively, de Boer's candidacy and the New Conservative's campaign can be viewed as the normalisation of far-right views. Overshadowed by Christopher Luxon's high-profile campaign – amidst speculation that Luxon was the heir apparent of former National leader John Key – de Boer did not attract much press attention. Local Auckland paper *Times* ran a favourable piece in their May 12, 2020 edition, downplaying a January visit from Police as "politically motivated," noting his opposition to the Abortion Legislation bill but not reporting that de Boer views abortion as tantamount to barbaric human sacrifice.

While de Boer only received a handful of votes, more than a handful of Botany residents will have watched him speak at candidate events. Even more will have read coverage of New Conservative policies and received copies of their glossy literature. And in this way, far-right talking points can be re-framed as simply common-sense conservative ideas.

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One last anecdote.

I met then New Conservative leader Leighton Baker at a candidate meeting in Christchurch, and engaged him in a conversation afterwards in regard to the party's staunch opposition to hate speech legislation, on the grounds that free speech rights should be paramount.

I was making the point that there is an argument that ethno-nationalists and fascists do not respect the free speech of dissidents once they are in power, and that as these groups do not respect the marketplace of ideas, perhaps they should be excluded from it. Leighton was having none of it.

"But what if [fascists] get support, and then seize power?" I asked. "If people choose fascism, that's OK with you?"

"Well, that's a stupid decision," he replied. "But the people have to choose, because otherwise, someone has dictated to them what they're allowed to choose. And isn't that to some degree fascism?"



# Pushing at an open door

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*How to Lose The Information War: Russia, Fake News and the Future of Conflict* by Nina Jankowicz (I.B. Taurus): review by DAPHNE LAWLESS

The authoritarian Russian state under Vladimir Putin is unquestionably an enemy of freedom and the working peoples of the world. It is hard not to cringe, though, when some American liberals try to blame Putin's Russia alone for the Trump cult and the rise of authoritarian racism in the USA. This whitewashes the United States' domestic history of white supremacy and social exclusion, and decades of liberal unwillingness to confront it.

But to deny altogether the impact of Russian information warfare on US politics is not only to deny the evidence ably collected by Robert Mueller and others; it is to deny equally strong evidence from several Eastern and Central European countries. It's a feature of the globalised system that whatever is happening on the periphery will eventually make its way back to the "metropolitan" states. In the same way that the occupied Palestinian territories have become laboratories for new ways of suppressing protests and inconvenient populations later taken up worldwide, the tactics of Russian disinformation and "troll farming" were perfected in countries like Ukraine, Estonia and Poland – and no-one in the West paid attention, until they helped tip the balance in the US Presidential election. As the deputy defence minister of Georgia complains:

I remember the arguments of the Russian threat that we were telling [Western officials] in 2006, 2007, 2008 ... We were considered to be crazed in Brussels and NATO headquarters, and now everybody [says] the same thing after eight years or nine years as if it's something new. (Kindle location 1086)

Nina Jankowicz, a scholar of "the intersection of democracy and technology" was in Ukraine advising that country's government on defence against Russian information warfare, when it suddenly became a live issue for the US in November 2016. Jankowicz's book has the great virtue of avoiding both the "denial" and "scapegoating" approaches to the topic. Yes, she emphasises,

Russian information warfare is real, it poisons the discourse and promotes reactionary politics and social conflict the world over. But it would have no purchase without taking advantage of pre-existing, real, social resentments and exclusions in every country. "The most convincing Russian narratives, and indeed, the most successful, in both Central and Eastern Europe and the United States, are narratives grounded in truth that exploit the divisions in societies." (166)

In the United States, the biggest social division is along the lines of race and migration status. In Estonia, it was the Russian-speaking minority who had become more or less second-class citizens since independence from the Soviet Union. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the biggest open wound in our society is of course the dispossession of Māori. Anyone who has seen a rally by the conspiracy theorist Billy Te Kahika will have seen the number of flags of Māori self-determination flying. This is a dangerous warning of the failure of the socialist Left to make its message more attractive to the most oppressed than Te Kahika's COVID denial and fascistic mutterings about "elite globalists".

Jankowicz brings up another problem which Fightback has repeatedly warned about – that Russian tactics of disinformation and heightening social tensions are not confined to promoting xenophobic or fascist ideas, but also promote Left-wing complaints about social inequality. In fact, contemporary Russian information warfare does not aim to promote any political ideology in particular, but only to heighten social divisions and tensions:

Despite the preferred imagery of most major news outlets that cover Russia—hammer and sickles, red and black color palettes, and misappropriations of the colorful onion domes of St. Basil's Cathedral as 'the Kremlin'—Russia's modern information war is distinct from the one its Soviet predecessor waged. Unlike Soviet propaganda, which sought to promote a specific, communist-centric worldview, the Kremlin divides and deceives populations around the world with one goal in mind: the destruction of Western democracy as we know it. (Kindle locations 118-121)

It is for this reason that Russian interference in the 2016 election not only boosted the Trump campaign, but also the campaign of social democrat Bernie Sanders, and even the "Black Lives Matter" movement:

They argued for Texas secession, spread anti-immigrant vitriol, pitted Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter activists against one another, and even distributed “buff Bernie Sanders” coloring books. They were “fake” not because their content was falsified—although they included plenty of false or misleading information—but because they misrepresented their provenance... [The Russian troll farm] IRA employees had been instructed to instigate “political intensity” by “supporting radical groups, users dissatisfied with [the] social and economic situations and oppositional social movements. (159, 362)

In line with her title, Jankowicz travelled to several Eastern and Central European countries to discuss the various ways in which they failed to stop Russian campaigns exploiting divisions within their societies. In some cases, it was because the local governments were complicit in the same thing. Poland’s governing party, the reactionary and homophobic Law and Justice Party, cannot successfully combat Russian forces spreading conspiracy theories, as long as they use precisely the same tactics against LGBT communities. Unsurprisingly, “some of the staunchest purveyors of this new wave of homophobic disinformation had connections to Russia” (1791).

Russian tactics thus make it perfectly possible to play both sides at once, not only for divisions within countries but between them, as they exploit mistrust and mutual ignorance between Western and Eastern Europe. Russia’s invasion of Georgia in 2008, leading to a continuing partial occupation, received no serious blowback from NATO, partly because Russian media successfully flooded Western media with the narrative that they were protecting minorities from Georgian “genocide”. (1184) Similarly, Russia intervened in a referendum in the Netherlands on European Union relations with Ukraine, successfully smearing Ukraine as a hotbed of corruption and fascism. At the same time, Russian media and Russia-aligned local media in Eastern European countries continually sound the warning that Western influence leads to homosexuality, paedophilia, obscenity, and attacks on traditional faiths (1374).

Jankowicz brings up the problem that I referred to in a previous article that disinformation and propaganda are “laundered” through Left-wing or Left-sounding voices. She quotes Georgian analysts who refer to this as the “deflective source model”: “disinformation is presented in a seemingly legitimate local source, and the original source of the information is obscured to make it seem more trustworthy.” (1365) She gives an extended

account of a US anti-Trump protest in 2017 which was massively boosted – unbeknownst to its organisers – by the very same Russian networks who provide content for far-right outlets like Breitbart (1358). Similarly, one of the biggest supporters of Russian propaganda against Ukraine in the Netherlands was Dutch Socialist Party leader and Eurosceptic Harry van Bommel – not because he cared a great deal about Ukraine, but because any narrative which bashed the EU was useful for his party. Van Bommel’s statement that “People blamed me personally for being in the same boat as fascists ... but, you know, sometimes people for the wrong reasons come to the right conclusions” (2129) is chilling for anyone who understands the threat posed by Red-Brown politics which blur the distinction between socialism and fascism.

Meanwhile, Ukraine attempted to salvage its image in the Dutch referendum with a campaign promoting a “positive narrative” about their country, which failed to have any impact. Jankowicz takes to task those strategists and politicians who believe that

if the West could only tell a more compelling, more strategic, more coordinated story, we could grapple with state-sponsored disinformation like the content that Russia produces. But this ignores realities of human nature and psychology. A press release, no matter how well written, cannot fully correct a salacious story. A fact-check, even if verified beyond a shadow of a doubt, will not convince a conspiracy theorist to give up his fervent speculations. (2439)

Only the Czech Republic, says Jankowicz, has put up any defence to Russian information warfare tactics – and even this has been derailed, partly because the unit responsible has its own problems with demonisation of Muslims and migrants, but also because many prominent politicians, including the country’s President, see it as a threat to free speech (2939).

Some socialist readers of this review might say: so what? Isn’t this just “blowback” from influence campaigns run by the CIA and other Western intelligence agencies? Harry van Bommel, for example, dismisses the question of Russian involvement in the Dutch referendum with reference to the fabricated intelligence about “Weapons of Mass Destruction” the United States used to justify the Iraq War. Jankowicz comments:

I can't disagree, and really, it's the perfect encapsulation of how Russian disinformation works: take something that people are already mad about, pollute the information ecosystem, and get them so frustrated they start to distrust institutions and disengage. (2390)

I've personally seen socialists suggest that this exacerbation of social divisions and distrust in the media ("the enemy of the people", as Trump used to put it) is a good thing for our side. This seems to assume that when people lose faith in mainstream politics and information, they may as well turn to a socialist view of the world as to conspiracy theory and fascism. This is simply not true – in none of the examples in the book, nor those I am familiar with, does the turn away from mainstream "consensus reality" lead in the direction of equality and democracy. The only "Left-wing" ideas which benefit from online disinformation are actually reactionary ones – "tankie" politics cheerleading authoritarian states, science denial which threatens lives in the era of COVID-19, or sheer bigotry couched in "Left" language against migrants or trans people.

In contrast, *Fightback* stands in the Marxian tradition of bringing "workers and science" together. Where we reject mainstream narratives and ideology, it is at the point where they contradict facts and logic, where they justify exploitation and oppression with irrational beliefs. This is directly contrary to the world which Russian information warfare seeks to create – a nihilist world of "alternative facts" bubbles, where democracy becomes impossible for lack of a shared reality, and only an authoritarianism that tells enough people what they want to hear can restore order. "When we can't agree on the truth within our own borders, we will not be able to dispute the lies coming from outside of them" (3268) – or anywhere else, for that matter.

Jankowicz is an American liberal and her solutions to the problem of information warfare – investment in journalism, improved education in civics and media literacy, and better funding for public libraries – rely on her belief that "what the West has, however imperfect, is worth fighting for" (250). She states in particular that "in this book, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have escaped serious inspection because the case studies outlined in these pages focus on government responses to disinformation". (3047) This leaves something of a gap in the book, since evidence shows that the best response to information warfare (and to fascism) is deplatforming – as shown by the effectiveness of banning ex-President Trump from Twitter – and that, conversely, these Big Tech giants actually profit from the social division and "outrage clicks" generated by disinformation.

Certainly, we must defend the very limited rights of freedom of speech, organization, and political participation which are allowed under neoliberal capitalism. But the social divisions created by that very society make it possible for not only the Russian state, but corporate, state and reactionary propagandists of all sorts, to effectively shit in the meme pool, and repress consciousness to the point that the masses reject even these meagre democratic rights in favour of the pleasures of chauvinism and bigotry. "Fake news" and disinformation are part of life under capitalism, and only an end to social inequality can put a final end to them.

# “She deserved it”

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*Troll Hunting: Inside the world of online hate and its human fallout* by Ginger Gorman (Hardie Grant, 2019); reviewed by KAREN EFFIE

I like Ginger Gorman a lot. She would make a good, thoughtful friend. She's open about her life and the difficulties she had with the book: the shaky boundaries between her and the trolls she researched, her gradual desensitization to the worst of trolling language, and her occasional changes of mind and heart as she got deeper into this world of misogyny, far rightism and mental chaos. I'm an older woman and an observer. My reactions may be similar to hers on a personal level, except I am much less internet savvy. I'm a good audience for her.

The book was also published in 2019 and talks about events that took place as long ago as 2010. 2019 seems like about a hundred years ago online. Gorman naturally omits much of what went down from about 2018 onwards, such as the Christchurch shooting and the scattering and hardening of important far right groups since Charlottesville. But politics is not her forte. She is interested in trolls as people, the effects of trolling on individuals, and in measures that could be taken to curtail predatory trolling (her term).

She begins with her own experience. As a liberal journalist she wrote up the story of two gay men who adopted a child, and her story portrayed them in a positive light. Later she discovered they had in fact kidnapped the child and were part of a paedophile ring. Gorman became the target of right-wing trolls who linked LGBTQ to paedophilia. She and her family were easily doxed and had to take measures to protect themselves. From there, she began to communicate with trolls, investigating their motivations and their lives. She also investigated the problems with legislation and the lack of political will that leaves targets of trolls with shattered lives and no official recourse.

The trolls themselves came from different ideological starting points. One man specialized in targeting left wing public figures he felt were not left wing enough. This particular man gave up trolling, seemingly maturing out of it. A larger number of trolls were avowedly on the right, including weev (real name Andrew Auernheimer) whom she interviewed by Skype while in hiding. In this interview, weev described himself as a professional racist who had always held Nazi views. For many trolls, however, ideology took a back seat to the lulz. Trolling was fun, brilliant, cruel, meaningless, sarcastic, pointed, transgressive, uniting, witty, elegant, powerful, self-deprecating,

self-aggrandizing, chaotic, vicious. Targets were chosen because they were seen as hypocritical or annoying.

Within that mess of obscure motivations and plausible deniability (it's just a joke!), two organizing features stood out.

The first was misogyny, either nascent or open. Women are shallow, they said. Women can't hack or troll. Women don't want us. Women are cancer. None of the trolls Gorman interviewed took an openly incel position but they weren't far off it. Misogyny was more baked into the trollish worldview than racism. Apparently targets always deserved to be trolled, sometimes for reasons obscure even to the trolls. Women targets almost automatically deserved it. Being a woman online was enough. As for 'she deserved it', the book has a chapter on trolling and partner violence.

The second was the absolute drive for free speech. These guys pursued free speech in a manner entirely devoid of irony, given their efforts to shut down anyone who pissed them off. The free speech argument was complete, axiomatic, and a position to fall back on when pressured.

Ginger Gorman's book explores these larger issues but comes to no particular conclusions. She unpacked the diffident stance taken by the police and other authorities. She also managed to get some useful information out of the Facebook representative for Australia and New Zealand (she is Australian). She called for stronger legislation and a more positive police response, and for social media giants to take responsibility. Much of this has been overtaken by events with recent bans by social media of Donald Trump and some far-right figures anyway.

She's better on the micro issues, the terrible effects of trolling on the lives of targets including public figures, and has some discussion about the blurring of public and private life online, and how much of our work makes an online life necessary so we can't just "not look at the internet" if we are being trolled. She also comes to the idea that lack of parenting has led to disaffected young men to take to trolling, a view based partly on what the trolls themselves told her. She doesn't go into the history of trolling or the broader concern of how a socio-political environment arose that enabled trolling to flourish.



I enjoyed reading the book and I would like to have a coffee with Gorman. But being amiable and empathetic is not enough for me. The problem is liberalism: the same general wistful confusion about how the hell we came to this that I experience when I consider such complex issues. Why can't we live and let live? Why can't we accept each other's differences? Why are we shouting and cancelling each other all the time? Why are we all so damaged? What happened to human decency? I am a natural liberal. I am of the generation that argued for free speech as part of a Left leaning agenda. I want a nuanced response to difference that values us all. I want to listen to the experiences of real people and only judge them once I know them, if at all. I could have written this book.

Since the Christchurch shooting, I have read what I can about the far right, and I have some disturbing experience of it from people in my life. I am perpetually perplexed and worried about it, but I don't think the answer lies in better parenting (whatever that is) or legislating social media, which would probably hurt the Left more in the long run. I don't think the overarching values of Left liberalism are anywhere near capable of dealing with the problem of trolling or any other feature of the far right.

Because, capitalism.

It is too late for all that. Trying to claw back good sense and decency and so on is not just an inadequate response to the sheer *extremity* of the multitudinous reactions to our truly dire socio-political and environmental situation. Cynicism, transgressivism, nihilism, atavism and accelerationism seem to me to be relatively meaningful reactions, and you don't get them just on the far right.

Also, this. The various far right projects, online and in vivo, serve to block attempts at dismantling capitalism, and even to get to those attempts we need to get through the far right because they are a genuine and more immediate threat. Unless we do, we risk being inveigled into working alongside them because some of them want to dismantle the system too, and they are way pragmatic, and gleefully transgressive, and armed for bear. And yet it is the totality of the terminal stage capitalism we experience which makes clear thinking difficult and genuine organizing exhausting and piecemeal. *Troll Hunting* is not about the far right as such, but it is about bad faith abuse of power differentials, and all the qualities of moral damage in which the far right abounds. Taking all this on, at 'real people' levels, rather than expecting authorities or media corporations to rescue us, seems to be a better solution.



# Anti-Semitism is the glue

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*Culture Warlords: My Journey Into the Dark Web of White Supremacy* by Talia Lavin (Monoray, 2020); review by WILL HOWARD

*Culture Warlords* functions as a look at some hard truths of the world. It's not very fun to be immersed in white supremacy, so I shy away from it. I let them have their corners, and fight them when they come near my spaces, but there's only so much time to be sad and angry in life, so I don't want to constantly give them my attention.

Talia Lavin makes a good case for why we **MUST** give them our attention, why we need to look at what they're doing, and why antifascist activism must include monitoring and shining a light on the activities of white supremacists and those who unwittingly support them.

Several things surprised me about this book, that I should have already known but somehow had missed:

I had managed to not realise that white supremacy depended so much on anti-Semitism as a stalking horse for all of the world's problems. Maybe this shows my sheer naivety, the same way that I felt stripped of innocence the first time I truly understood the level of threat my female friends go through on a daily basis, that our society bakes in with ever present sexualisation, and therefore ever-present danger scanning for sexual assault.

White supremacy depends for a chunk of its power on being unacknowledged. Simply naming these people, showing what they are doing and how they are organising, robs them of essential power (as it makes them less terrifying), but it also makes them less likely to recruit.

Lavin encourages us to be aware of the radicalisation of people via social media such as YouTube, and the seduction of found communities that embrace despair. People who long for imagined golden ages are prime targets for far-right recruitment. Anti-Semitism is used as a glue to hold together a bunch of theories that make no sense if you look at them closely.

People who may have correctly identified capital as the enemy are instead encouraged to hate "The Jews," who are portrayed by the far-right as insidious elites in control of global capitalism.

Reading the book will give you a familiarity with terms associated with the alt-right such as "the Boogaloo" a meme about a second civil war in the United States, and "incels" or involuntary celibates, a deeply misogynistic community which overlaps with the alt-right, particularly in their online spaces where hatred of women is intertwined with racism. Lavin also examines the role the spectre of "Antifa" plays in the psyche of the alt-right, and why we hear so much about them.

*Culture Warlords* is a wild ride through a lot of seriously unfun stuff. But I came away from reading it mostly hopeful that the nightmares I'd just read about can be resolved.

Essentially, this is a great book to have around if you want a primer on the alt-right and white supremacy to show to others. It doesn't pull punches on describing exactly what's going on in the darker parts of the Internet. At the same time, it shows that these people want horrifying things, and hatred is sadly not something we have left in the past.

It's a great book for getting angry, and for inspiring you to do something with that anger. And for showing that your anger **CAN** make a difference. That the nebulous forces of modern-day fascism, racism, and chauvinistic anti-feminism can be countered, and while they're great at making noise, they're not as big as they try to make themselves appear. Lavin describes many of the things we can do to fight:

**Catalogue those who take part in white supremacy.** People still in general know it's wrong, it is rare for someone to be willing to back up their statements of intent, and people know there are consequences when they are named as part of these kinds of hateful groups.

**Interrupt their planning/infiltrate their spaces.** While I would leave this particular tactic to people with more energy than me, it's recounted in the book, and definitely works.

**Find ways to shut down their "dark-web" sections.** As an IT professional, I feel that calling the places reported on here the "dark-web" is mystifying them, as in most cases these are websites and messaging applications anyone can go to. The more

we can deplatform racism, the harder it is for white supremacists to connect openly and plan.

**Support the efforts of any who humanise the other.**

Do your part to know other cultures, don't accept racist jokes, make people think about the things they say, and help each other. Find a way to de-escalate people who have started falling into this stuff.

**Point out that it's capital that's the enemy, not "the Jews."** Fight coded messages about bankers and rich families. Don't let racist assholes derail the very real villainy that's contained in the wealthy by mislabelling it as a Jewish conspiracy.

**Come up with alternative communities to slide the disaffected into.** So that they are not preyed upon by the far-right.

Talia hints at most of the above, though this book is intended as a guide, not a manual for disassembling the structures of power that white supremacy and

anti-feminism are living on. Her words are heartfelt, and her descriptions poignant. This book catalogues what kind of hate is out there in the world, and gives a lens to view it. It calls for action, because inaction is to surrender. We should hear that call and unite to fight for a world worth living in.

All in all, I'd say it's an excellent book for either stoking your rage, targeting your rage against the kinds of assholes who want to watch the world burn, or perhaps to give to friends or family members to provoke discussion. I'm not sure it will give you easy discussions, or that it will definitely sway anyone who's already bought into white supremacy. But I think it might be the wakeup call that some people need to recognise the ills of our modern world.

These Nazi's aren't going to deplatform themselves, let's get to it.

## The rise of illiberal democracy

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*Orbán: Europe's New Strongman* by Paul Lendvai (C Hurst & Co, 2019);  
reviewed by BYRON CLARK

While there has hardly been a shortage of strongman leaders for the right to admire in recent years, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has stood out. Last year Vox referred to him as "The American right's favourite strongman"<sup>60</sup> and British far-right figurehead Tommy Robinson described him as the "defender of Europe" when appearing on Hungarian television.

In New Zealand Orbán has been praised by the far-right YouTube personality Lee Williams (who has favourably compared the New Conservative party to Orbán's Fidesz party) and in Australia his support comes not just from the fringes but from mainstream politicians; in 2019 former Prime Minister Tony Abbott gave a speech in Hungary claiming migrants are "swarming across the borders in Europe".<sup>61</sup> Orbán was also praised by then US president Donald Trump in 2019 for doing a "tremendous job".<sup>62</sup>

The biography "*Orbán: Europe's New Strongman*" is the first book published in English on the topic of the Orbán regime. Paul Lendvai was born in Hungary and is now based in Austria. For this book he has drawn on work from Hungarian journalists and political scientists, making the book in-depth despite its short length. It is written for an international audience and doesn't require extensive prior knowledge of Hungarian history or politics.

Orbán's rise to power followed scandals in the centre-left Socialist Party, including financial corruption. While Orbán's Fidesz regime has been far more corrupt, with Orbán enriching himself using the power he wields as prime minister, the Socialist Party is judged more harshly by voters for the sheer hypocrisy of their corruption; with Orbán's Fidesz Party it has been expected.

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60 <https://www.vox.com/2020/5/21/21256324/viktor-Orbán-hungary-american-conservatives>

61 <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/why-australia-s-conservatives-are-finding-friends-in-hungary-20190924-p52uim.html>

62 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/may/13/trump-latest-viktor-Orbán-hungary-prime-minister-white-house>

Orbán has used anti-immigrant populism to gain support in one of Europe's most ethnically homogeneous countries. At a march in Paris following the terror attack on Charlie Hebdo cartoonists, he announced "Zero tolerance against immigrants...As long as I am Prime Minister, and as long as this government is in power, we will not allow Hungary to become the destination of immigrants steered from Brussels."

His government has erected billboards with messages to refugees – that if they want to come to Hungary they must integrate with Hungarian society, and must not take jobs from Hungarians. These billboards are however written in Hungarian, and are unlikely to be read by any Syrian or Iraqi refugees entering the country- a number which is very small, in part due to the fences erected on the country's border with Croatia. The billboards are not really there for refugees to read; they are there to implant the idea in the minds of Hungarians that immigrants will steal jobs and refuse to integrate.

The regime has been effective at spreading this xenophobia. Polling cited in the book notes that fear of a terrorist attack from refugees (a statistically unlikely probability) is higher in Hungary than any other European country. More recent polls conducted since the book's publication show sixty percent of Hungarians have a negative or very negative opinion of immigrants while a similar number (fifty four percent) hold negative or very negative opinions of Muslims.<sup>63</sup>

"Orbán makes no secret of his satisfaction at the misery of the refugees" writes Lendvai in reference to one of the prime minister's speeches in 2015 at the height of the refugee crisis, where Orbán claimed "The crisis offers the opportunity for the national Christian ideology to reign supreme, not only in Hungary but in all of Europe".

Orbán has also made a bogeyman of George Soros, the Hungarian-born billionaire philanthropist who is a common figure in far-right conspiracy theories. Orbán, echoing those same theories, claims that Soros is promoting mass migration of Muslims into Europe. While Orbán claims that Muslim migrants will spread anti-Semitism, his rhetoric about Soros (a Jew and Holocaust survivor) comes with a heavy anti-Semitic subtext. Paraphrasing the liberal Hungarian weekly *Magyar Narancs*, who have compared the Soros conspiracy theory to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Lendvai writes "The world Jew has not been mentioned in the Soros context as there is no need – everybody understands the reference". Polls cited by Lendvai show almost a third of Hungarians holding anti-Semitic views. Ironically, it was philanthropic work by Soros' Open Society Foundation, promoting human rights and liberal democracy in Europe after the fall of the Eastern Bloc, that funded much of Orbán's education.

The Fidesz regime in Hungary is likely to remain in power for years to come – in part because of constitutional changes made with the party's unprecedented two thirds majority in parliament, and extensive gerrymandering – and will serve as inspiration for far-right groups in Europe and even further afield. This book will give readers the broad overview of contemporary Hungary that will help us recognise when politicians in our own countries attempt to come to power on a similar platform of xenophobia and bigotry.

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63 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/europeanstateofhate-polling/>



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